



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

The Role of Civic Education in Creating Engaged, Lifelong Learners and Building Strong Communities

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

4th Annual EDUCATION LEADERSHIP COLLOQUIUM
Orlando, Florida
July 12, 2004

Good afternoon. Thank you, Liz, for that kind introduction. It is a great pleasure to work with you. Thank you for your leadership of Campus Compact. Through our PK-16 collaboration we can truly strengthen our common mission of civic education and engagement.

As the new chair of the National Center for Learning and Citizenship, I am proud to be a part of this thorough exploration of citizenship education for students from kindergarten through college.

I would like to thank the State Farm Companies Foundation for sponsoring this colloquium and to recognize the important contribution that the Carnegie Corporation made in sponsoring *The Civic Mission of Schools* report. Cindy Gibson is here.

Thank you also to Terry Pickeral, executive director of the NCLC, and his staff for their hard work to put citizenship education and service-learning on the agenda of every policy leader.

We are here today because we know in our minds, hearts, and souls that now more than ever, we need to create engaged, lifelong learners and build strong communities through quality citizenship education and service-learning. At no moment in our recent past has civic involvement and social consciousness been more needed. Our democracy depends on an educated citizenry, and closing the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged children, children of color, and their peers must be a priority.

Americans are debating the political and economic future of our country this presidential election year. American women and men are overseas serving their nation, in combat, in a conflict that will have long-term implications for our future foreign and economic policy. Americans are deeply concerned about foreign and domestic policies and security as well as our economic welfare. In this trying, uncertain time, all Americans will agree that our country needs to teach our children active and principled citizenship and civic engagement.

We can't underestimate how carefully our children and young people are watching us role model citizenship, or how important it is to involve them in understanding the process of democracy in their own community, in our nation, and the world.

Every day our children and young people are asking us questions that we as adults are finding harder and harder to answer.

Young people must see the connection—experientially, hands on—between content they're learning in the classroom and how it applies in the real world. And young people must believe their voices are being heard as we work together on the tough issues of creating the American democracy of the next generation.

(more)

In Wisconsin we have had a long, progressive tradition of belief in and support for public schools, universities, and libraries as the foundation of a strong democracy. In the past few years, we have embarked on an essential revitalization and conceptualization of democratic citizenship education in Wisconsin, which is bringing people together, PK-16, from across the state.

We are working with community-based organizations, schools of education, and through the development and networking of the University of Wisconsin System; Campus Compact, headed in Wisconsin by Executive Director Tom Schnaubelt (SHNAW belt), and Chancellor Keating, of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside; with regional groups, such as the Southeastern Wisconsin Service Learning Consortium led by Superintendent Bill Hughes, all three of whom are here today. We have developed the Wisconsin Learning Lab for Service-Learning and Citizenship, working with the Educational Communications Board, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wisconsin State Bar, and Wisconsin Supreme Court.

Through collaboration, our civic mission is becoming more and more visible throughout our communities and we are finding the common ground around our democratic ideals of public education.

Last September, in Wisconsin, I sponsored the State Superintendent's PK-16 Conference on Service-Learning and Citizenship to honor effective practice and promote service-learning at the local level. The governor of Wisconsin and the first lady, a former middle school teacher, and both former Peace Corps volunteers, were participants in this statewide conference.

With the elected state superintendent, the governor, and the first lady providing advocacy and leadership – we are working to bring teachers, parents, students, higher ed, policymakers, and administrators together to bring relevance to academic, social, and emotional learning by engaging young people in their own education, empowering the voice of young people, and invigorating the vision of democracy through service to one's community.

These efforts will accelerate with our participation as one of three states, joining South Carolina and New Hampshire, in the ECS/NCLC State Policy Options program.

In Wisconsin, we believe that through these efforts we will emphasize high academic achievement through the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as the ability among youth to apply that knowledge as responsible citizens.
(transition)

Gathered today are the states and educational institutions, assisted by NCLC and Campus Compact, who are working to promote citizenship education and service-learning. We applaud all of you for your hard work and commitment.

We have the opportunity to learn from each other and to build a coalition of advocacy and best practice, so that, as a nation, we embrace a renewed commitment to teaching our children and young adults the high responsibilities of citizenship. What is most important is that we sustain our work, energy, and enthusiasm from this ELC as we continue to work for the public good. Our future is shaped by how we educate our next generation.

Recognizing the importance of teacher education and on-going professional development and the imperative of a K-16 collaboration, our NCLC Executive Board has decided to focus on the following action agenda to support citizenship education and service-learning efforts over the next two years by advancing research and assessment.

There are gaps in civic knowledge among our students. We also can identify places in textbooks where civic themes could be included. These themes could be infused into reading books particularly at the elementary level. Students shouldn't first be introduced to these vital competencies at the high school level. We intend to analyze textbooks from the largest textbook publishers. Together with the publishers we hope to work toward the inclusion of more civic content in these texts, beginning with reading books at the elementary level, as well as examining what makes texts meaningful and engaging to students.

Some, but not all, states have already developed PK-12 standards which include civic competencies. Others are reviewing existing standards and considering ways to revise them. The ECS paper on competencies has taken important steps toward developing rubrics related to civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions starting in the early years of schooling. A next step is to develop and pilot assessment

strategies, tools and protocols to show state and local policy makers that it is possible to assess these competencies and provide them a starting point for developing assessments that are appropriate for their own standards and educational contexts. The NCLC will also analyze textbooks from the largest publishers and work toward the inclusion of more civic content as well as examining what makes texts meaningful and engaging to students.

The NCLC must also work to Build District Leadership Capacity.

It is important to complement our state-level policy work with models and incentives at the local level. We need to identify best practices at local levels and provide incentives for research, publication, and conferences at the district level.

We will develop a national network of champion districts, willing to share their expertise and how their efforts have enhanced district reform and school improvement.

In all our endeavors, it is important to continually expand our networks of critical friends and partners at local, state, and national levels, and to articulate the implications of our work for federal policy.

Over the past seven years, NCLC has focused on state and district policy. We now want to take what we've learned about effective policy and best practices at those levels to inform and influence federal education policy and to encourage incentives and rewards at the federal level for service learning and innovation in citizenship education.

The success of this ambitious and much-needed agenda lies not only in the work of NCLC and our partners. We ask each of you here today to join us in promoting citizenship education and service-learning in your states and communities.

The work of the NCLC is a call to action. It will take coalitions at the local, state, and federal levels to further this agenda.

In building these coalitions I think we all agree – the future of our democracy lies in how we respond. Thank you.